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# A LETTER

TO THE

CHESTNUT ST. CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH,

CHELSEA, MASS.,

IN REPLY TO ITS CHARGE

OF

HAVING BECOME A REPROACH TO THE CAUSE OF TRUTH,  
IN CONSEQUENCE OF A CHANGE OF RELIGIOUS BELIEF.

BY JOHN S. ADAMS.

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"HE ANSWERED AND SAID, . . . ONE THING I KNOW, THAT WHEREAS I WAS BLIND, NOW SEE." "AND THEY CAST HIM OUT."—John 9: 25, 34.

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"Why not of your own selves judge ye what is right?"—JESUS.

"The corner-stone of our Fabric is the *Light Within*, as God's gift for man's salvation. This is Emanuel or God with us, and this admits not of any book or judge to come between this voice of God and the soul, as its rule of faith and practice."—WM. PENN.

"The intuitive convictions of the minds of created beings as to honor and dishonor, right and wrong, are the *most important* in the universe. They are the voice of God himself in the soul."—EDWARD BEECHER.

"Some readers may take offence at some of the sentiments of this book. Especially will this be likely to happen with those who have not been accustomed to distinguish what is divine and what is human in the sacred record."—NEANDER.

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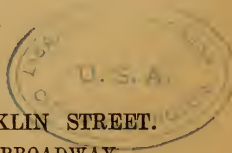
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## LETTER.

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*To the Members of the Chestnut-street Congregational Church, Chelsea, Mass.*

It is now nearly two years since my attention was first directed to the subject of Spiritual Intercourse. I saw, at once, that it was a subject of great importance, and that it demanded a careful and candid examination, for two reasons:

*First*, If it was true, it was a blessing of inestimable worth.

*Second*, If it was an error, it was one productive of incalculable evil

In either case, it demanded man's most energetic action.

I entered upon my examination free to receive truth, and guarded against all approach of error. I beheld the manifestations in every variety of form, and under all circumstances. Soon my wife became the medium of communication, and closely, in my own house, I studied the events that transpired. Her development was gradual, and with it my faith in the truth of the subject grew daily stronger; until, to deny the fact of actual, sensible communication with my spirit-friends, would be to deny

my own senses ; for the proof was as positive as that the sun shines at noon-day.

From the first of my interest in the subject, I was free to make it known to all. Yet not one of those who had professed to have a care over my spiritual interests came near me.

With my pastor, whom I had always loved, and do yet highly esteem, I was open and free. I urged him to call upon me, and with me freely examine a subject whose faith was fast encircling my own mind ; and not only mine, but those of a vast multitude in the church. A subject making the claims that this does would seem, at least, worthy of a fair examination, especially by those who minister at the altars of the visible church.

The general opinion is that the clergy look upon this subject as a delusion—a falsehood. Yet the clergy know, or should know, that what they, in a perfect ignorance of the facts, call a delusion, has within a few years won over to a firm, unchangeable adherence to its belief, over one million in this country alone, many of whom are in their own churches, under their own special guardianship. They know, also, that the views now held by this large and rapidly increasing army, included in which are many of the strongest intellects of the age, are, in many points, directly opposed to their creeds,—a belief in which is by them considered essential to eternal happiness. In view of these things, I cannot account for the inactivity of the clergy, and their evasion of a just examination of the subject. Surely, the five years during which these manifestations have been rife have afforded sufficient time and opportunity for them thoroughly to examine, and, if it be a delusion, to expose it. All who have ventured to examine have found that what they

ignorantly called a delusion is, indeed, a glorious truth. Those who hold back seem fearful to test the matter, lest they also be driven, irresistibly, to the same conclusion, and to a change of doctrinal views.

My pastor answered my written request with perfect silence ; and, though day after day, and week following week, I waited and hoped he would come forward and learn the true nature of the facts in the case, yet I waited and hoped in vain.

Daily, hourly, my faith grew stronger, and I felt the presence of holy spirits, and listened to their glad messages. I shall not have space in this letter to narrate my spiritual experience, — I can only say it has been, and is, inexpressibly happy.

Thus convinced, beyond the possibility of a doubt, that spirits who once inhabited bodies like our own, our nearest and dearest friends, can and do commune with and instruct us ; and, also, believing that they, having passed beyond the veil that conceals from our natural eye the future that awaits us, have a better knowledge of the realities of the world to come, man's duty here and destiny hereafter, than any man or number of men on earth ; I accept their teachings rather than any others, always subjecting them to the test of reason, and my own intuitive sense of right.

Would *you* not listen when angels whisper in your ears, and the spirit-mother — she who, when in this state of existence, you loved, believed and obeyed — tells you of the future ? You can listen. You can catch upon your waiting ear that mother's voice. You can be convinced of her actual presence near you. You never doubted her before. Will you now ? That sister, too, who many, very many years ago, bade you "good-by,"



and spake no word again, stands often at your side. She comes with glad tidings for you. She comes to tell you of the glorious home she has found beyond the skies, and to bid you dismiss your doubts, banish your fears, for such a home awaits you. Do you doubt her words? Do you turn from her angel-teachings to the theories of men? How can you?

Let me assure you these are no fancy thoughts. In these remarks I do not *suppose* these things are so, but I *know* from happy experience that they are, — an experience which worlds on worlds cannot purchase; the enduring, satisfying joys of which no human thought can fathom. Such an experience can be yours, if you will accept it; yours personally, yours practically. “Seek and ye *shall* find: knock and it shall be opened unto *you*.”

But the church will not seek, and how can *it* find? Here are great facts transpiring all around it. Why should the church turn its back upon truths so glorious? For the self-same reason that the Jewish church rejected Christ, because their teachings are not in unison with its old belief. I pity this church. I pity it for its want of faith, for its struggle against truth, for its rejection, in the denial of these manifestations, of the most prominent events of Scriptural record. The believers in spiritualism fear not the closest scrutiny of the foundation of their belief. They ask investigation, for they know that a candid examination will convince the most sceptical of the truth of the subject. Those persons are sadly ignorant of these things who suppose that spiritualism rests on raps and tipping tables. Such manifestations were first demanded, in order to attract attention, and satisfy the materialism of the age. Now, the husband speaks



with the wife, who, for many years, he mourned as one lost; and the wife with the husband. Parents converse with children, children with departed parents, sister with brother, friend with friend; and when these kindly greetings are over, and affection finds a response to its voice of love, knowledge of that better world is sought, and spirits of intelligence, who have studied in the courts of heaven the wisdom of spirit-life, come and teach us as those having authority, and not as the scribes. But they claim not infallibility, and they ask us to exercise our reason, and judge for ourselves the truth of what they tell us.

Shall I reject all these things because their teachings do not coincide with my previous views? Were I infallible, I might do so; but as I am, I cannot. Consequently, when I see newly-developed truths as this light shines upon my path, I accept them gladly, and the result thus far is, that whereas I was once blind, I now see; and with the deepest sincerity, with the most heart-felt gratitude, I thank God that through ministering angels I have been enabled to see Him as He is, and to know Him as He is known.

Your committee called on me twice. Not one single word from any member until an official action! On neither occasion was any word offered to prove my position wrong. And why? Because I had a foundation of which they knew nothing, and what could they say? I thank them for their manner of inquiring respecting my views, and trust that they and you will continue your inquiries until you all shall know the rock on which my feet are standing, and stand there also.

On the 10th inst. I received a letter from your committee, of which the following is a copy:

*“Chelsea, May 9th, 1854.*

“MR. JOHN S. ADAMS.

“DEAR BROTHER: The undersigned, a committee appointed by the church of which you and we are members, to specify charges against you which, greatly to our grief and that of our brethren, have become a reproach to the cause which you have solemnly professed to love,—

“We charge you,

“1st. With a violation of your solemn covenant with this church, in forsaking the communion and public worship with its members.

“2d. We charge you with denying the inspiration and divine authenticity of the Holy Scriptures.

“After having reported your cause at a meeting of the church, called for that purpose, we were instructed to prefer charges against you, and summon you to appear before it on Friday evening next, the 12th inst., at half-past eight o’clock, in the large vestry of the Chestnut-street Society, then and there to show reasons, if any you have, why the church should not proceed to separate you from its fold.

“Dear brother, we entreat you to consider your course, and retrace your steps, and compel us not to resort to this last solemn act, the highest and most momentous that a church can perform. Meanwhile, we shall not cease to pray for your restoration and return to duty.

“In behalf of the church,

“Your brethren in Christ,

“L. B. HORTON,

“R. F. PARK.”

Now, I ask, what is the cause I professed to love? Was it the cause of your creed, your doctrines? No,

far from it. The cause I professed to love was the cause of God and of truth. *I love it still*; and I can offer no greater proof to you of my love for it than to declare the joy I have in now publicly throwing aside the bonds of your covenant, that I may join indissolubly my whole soul to that cause. I did not profess to love *your* theology—it is the theology of man. It is full of contradictions and inconsistencies, full of perplexities and doubts. It leads man to study and trammel his mind with doctrines which, in future years, the fire and hammer of truth must labor hard to dislodge.

But I *did* profess to love the theology of God. It is always the same. The flower always buds and blossoms, and teaches the *same* lesson. God's theology leads me in beautiful paths, beside still waters, and ever upward and onward through myriad millions of countless creations, to the great Creator; and I am taught, at every step, that He is my Father and my God. God's theology is written on the broad pages of the universe. Nature is its creed, and the closer I adhere to its requirements, the happier I shall be. I ask no better. I can have none. It is more enduring than tables of stone, and less changeable than any book. Jesus spoke a sermon from it when he said, "Do unto others as ye would that others should do unto you." Such a creed never lit Smithfield fires, never invented Inquisitorial tortures. It never thrust mankind into dens of lions, nor broke their limbs on a wheel. It never created a hell for human souls.

"Do unto others as ye would that others should do unto you." Glorious doctrine! Heavenly creed! Humanity's confession of faith!

Do you say I have become a reproach to the cause I profess to love? I deny the charge. Because I do not

conform to your creed, am I recreant to truth? Are you infallible? If not, then there *is* a possibility that you may be wrong.

You bring charges against me, and what are these charges?

You charge me with an exercise of my own freedom; with doing as my own conscience demands that I should do. You charge me with exercising my own will, in opposition to church-authority. Gentlemen, I acknowledge *no* authority but God. I bow to *no* law but the higher law, written indelibly on my own heart; and though the church and the state become leagued against that authority, and that law, I will not forsake God's truth; no, never!

Deeply conscious that the doctrines of the Orthodox church are not founded on truth, I resolved to discountenance its errors, and to employ the little ability I might possess against them. Sabbath after Sabbath, as I attended your place of worship, my whole soul revolted against many of the teachings I there heard. True, some were of God, but I could not keep from my mind those dark, despairing, hopeless doctrines you profess to believe, rendering your whole system contradictory and inconsistent in itself. I considered those doctrines unjust to man, and equally dishonorable to God; and I left, pitying you, yet charitably believing that in the inmost recesses of your own souls *such* views found no quiet resting-place; for I deem it *impossible* for any rational, reasoning, free mind to adopt them unhesitatingly as its own.

Thousands, to-day, live despairingly in the spirit-world, crushed and weighed down with the chains the creed of popular theology has placed upon them. I speak understandingly. Could you hear, as I have heard, the



voices of such immortals, saying, “ We were taught God had cast us off forever, and we cannot advance ; it is useless to attempt it ; ” and as we told them that such a belief was erroneous, that God was drawing all unto himself, that his love and care was over *all* his works, from the smallest atom to the highest seraph ; and as we led them up, step by step, to more just views of God, and more hopeful views of their own destiny ; and as, finally, we heard them rejoicing in the light that then began to dawn upon them, and in the bliss they experienced, you would not wonder that my soul is roused, and a determination exists within me to act with my whole being in opposition to your doctrines, and for God and humanity.

You charge me with denying “ the inspiration and divine authenticity of the Holy Scriptures.” I deny the charge. I admit their inspiration and their divine authenticity ; for *all* writings are inspired, and all “ holy ” writings are divine.

What is the Bible ? Did you ever ask your own conscientious spirit the question, and receive from its inner sanctuary, where no sectarian voice ever sounded, no doctrinal champion ever fought, an answer independent of the popular opinion, of church creeds and ecclesiastical authority ? An answer which your reason willingly assented to, and which, without one single doubt or wish to amend, you would willingly bear with you through an eternity, subject to the gaze of a countless host of angels ? Did you ever look at the question as you should, — look at it with your reason, as God would have you look at all things ? Did you ever lay aside the thoughts of others, and think seriously whether every page, and chapter, and verse of the book, is worthy of the great Author to whom you ascribe them ? Did you ever com-

mence at Genesis and read on, asking your own reason — not asking whether this man believes it, or that man — but, as a matter concerning *yourself*, asking yourself whether God spake thus and thus ?

The Bible ! In my infant ears a voice whispered, “It is God’s holy word.” Childhood came, and the words of the teacher, and the associations and incidents around me, fixed more firmly in my mind the idea told me so often in earlier days, “The Bible is holy ; it came direct from God to poor, sinful, degraded man.” I looked on the volume with feelings of awe and reverence. “What !” thought I, “a book from God ? It must be *very* holy,” and in my soul I worshipped it.

One day in seven the “sacred book” lay on the desk of a city church, and I wondered much at the thoughtlessness displayed by all my superiors in its presence. It seemed a holy thing to me, and almost a god ; for others besides myself worshipped it, and I thought strange that what some so much adored others treated with apparent neglect.

I believed the *whole* Bible ; I believed, as tens of thousands do, not from any reasonable and just convictions of its truth, but because from the moment I could distinguish a sound I had been told it was God’s word — I had never been allowed to doubt, never to examine with a view of coming to the truth, but *always* with a view of believing. I feared to be true to myself ; to know in my own heart whether what I was so emphatically told was God’s word was it, indeed, and nothing else. I was told that the Bible was a perfect rule of faith and practice — the *only* revelation of God to man, and all I needed to conduct me safely and happily through this to a brighter world. And I believed it all. I be-



lieved because I was told to do so. Its mysteries confounded me at times, and I accepted as God's holy truth many things, which, if I had found in any other book, I should have at once rejected, as unworthy man's belief — and so would any reasonable mind. But I found them in the Bible, and I was told I must *not* attempt to reconcile them with *my* ideas of truth, honor, and justice. There seemed to be here and there a contradiction, but I dare not question respecting it. I *must* believe. The command was imperative ; and threatenings against unbelief were as severe as mind could conceive of. To my young spirit it seemed far preferable to believe anything rather than encounter a sea of living flame, from whose depths went up a requiem whose loudest notes were those of weeping, and wailing, and gnashing teeth !

Thus was I, thus are millions in this Christian land, taught to crush the reason within them, and bow humbly at the shrine of an unknown Deity ! I would have been thought striving to become overwise, had I attempted so to establish my mind that I might be able to give a reason for the hope that was in me,— that I had in the Bible God's *whole* truth.

Deep thought at times came upon me, and I said, “I am told that this book is a perfect rule of life,— a revelation so clear that all may read and understand. But there is much that *I* do not understand, and, what is very disheartening to me, I am told I must not *try* to understand.” And then I thought, would the all-wise Creator make a revelation of truth to us, and introduce into that revelation much that is important for us to know, but which it is *impossible* for us to understand,— impossible for any of his ministers, said to be specially called by him to explain his word, to explain on grounds just

and honorable, and in harmony with other portions of the same revelation? Again, I thought, one man, who claims to have a divine commission to preach the Gospel to every creature, interprets the Bible in one way; another, making the same claims, interprets it differently; a third, likewise called of God, gives it another meaning; and thus on and on, without number, different men, all making the *same* pretensions to divine authority, set forth as many different views of the truth as revealed in God's written word; and so conclusively does each from the Bible prove his own view to be true, that he has a sect of his own, numbering thousands of members, no two of whom agree on every point of belief in their own creed of what the Bible teaches.

But the Bible, I was told, is the "word of God"—the only chart to guide us over life's tempestuous sea to a haven of eternal rest. When I thought of that, and beheld a world of angry disputants standing over that chart and indulging in every contrary opinion as to the course it would have us pursue, I exclaimed, from my inmost soul, "*Is this my only guide?*"

But then the minister said so. Parents, brothers, sisters, friends, said so,—and *they* would not deceive me. Such a belief had supported them in hours of sorrow, and illuminated what then to me appeared the dark valley of death. So *they* said. Could I doubt *them*? Ah, no; I did not! I wanted that support, that light, and I said I believed it all.

I joined the church. I took upon me its creed; and *never* shall I forget the thrill that entered every fibre of my being as I listened to the reading of the mysterious doctrines it set forth; and the words, "Wherever you go these *vows* will be upon you; hereafter you can

*never* withdraw," sounded in my ears like the creaking of a prison-door that closed on me forever, or the forging of fetters that would imprison my spirit. I indeed felt the shackles of a creed on my mental organism ; and on my heart the chill of church walls. For a time I questioned not. I was the passive member of a human church ; the believer, without a satisfactory reason of the hope that was in me.

Nor was mine a solitary case. Could you read the secret thoughts of those who gather at your seasons of communion, on many a heart's tablet of those who think and reason you would find written these deep meaning words, " What is Truth ? Alas, I cannot find it ! " You doubt what I say ; you think I judge harshly. Look within your own heart, and see whether those words are not written there in a restless desire for something holier and higher, and more like God, than anything you have yet found in your church or its belief.

O, how, during all those years, Truth knocked at the door of my heart and asked for admittance ; and I shouted, " Away, Away ! I do not know you ! " And it was even so. I did *not* know his voice. I had listened for it long, and thought that when I heard it I should run and fall down and worship it. Now it came, and I refused to admit it. And yet I loved the stranger. There was something in his voice that seemed to blend sweetly with the voice of reason within me, and my soul went out through the barred and bolted door of my heart, and fraternized with Truth.

In the quiet night, in the silent hour of meditation, my soul went forth to commune with the spirit of God. I found it in the dim old forest, in the blue sky above, in the earth beneath me. I heard it in every rustling leaf,

every warbler's carol, every rippling brook and flowing river; and I found all love, all goodness, all perfectly adapted to the mental and physical wants of man. I beheld no mystery, no contradiction, no discord. Neither heard I among the sons of men any difference of opinion as to *such* a revelation. All was harmonious. The chapter written on the blue-tinted page above contained no word, on all its vast length and breadth, that conflicted with any on the equally broad page spread beneath. All this to me seemed a revelation that was indeed the "word of God" written with his hand,—a revelation which no human hand could deface, no human will change.

While I considered these things, Truth knocked at the door of my heart with redoubled vigor; and more distinctly than ever I heard its calm, clear voice saying unto me, "Open, open, open!"

But dare I open my prison-house? Dare I advance with those solemn oaths upon me, and the fearful words "*never withdraw*" standing out before my eyes, written in letters of living fire from the depths of an unquenchable furnace?

I ventured to raise the latch, but I dare not open the door. At length, the thought came to my mind—Perhaps my friends may themselves be deceived. I have accepted every page of the Bible as from God, mainly because they at first told me to do so, and not because I was fully, undoubtingly convinced in my heart of its truth. How could it be otherwise? When a little child I was told so and so; what power had *I* to know or judge of the matter?

The belief instilled into my mind at that age grew with my growth and strengthened with my strength.



Looking back to the time when I thus drank in the doctrines which I never could comprehend, I saw that I had taken them to please others, rather than in answer to the demands of my own spirit ; and now that I had grown to manhood I felt an inward rebellion against the unnatural sustenance that had been forced upon my soul, and, instead of increasing, had retarded its growth. I felt that God had given me reasoning powers and faculties, which, if exercised, would bring me to a knowledge of all truth ; that, unless I was to employ them, they would remain dormant, and I should live in disobedience to His will ; because the very fact that He gave me those faculties plainly shew that it was His will that I should use them. But I had not used them. I had taken what others told me as truth, without consulting my reason or employing my judgment ; and I felt now that it was indeed time that I awoke my mind from its inactivity, and, putting Reason as commander, and Judgment at the helm, might feel my bark advance over the ocean of Truth, and no longer allow it to be at the mercy of the ever-varying winds of popular opinion. To such a course my soul at once and heartily assented. But the church said “ No.” It would have me keep my sails furled, and my bark moored at its pier, waiting for the spiritual food to come, rather than to go forth and obtain it.

But, thought I, what is this church that wishes to govern my reason, and hold all the powers of my mind in abeyance to its dictation ? It is composed of men, — fallible men, like myself, — and is, therefore, as liable to err as I am. It holds as sacred truths certain writings and opinions, handed to it from past ages. It accepts them as such more on account of the supposed fact that mankind has always done so, than from any real, fearless, un-

biased examination, each for himself, of their inherent claims. This train of thought led me to conclude that I would look at the foundation of my belief, and know, if possible, beyond a doubt, whether the Bible was, as a whole, good and true, or whether some portions of it were otherwise. I felt, deeply, that I had no end to gain but truth; and the belief that could not bear a thorough examination was not worthy of my faith.

I determined to be able to answer the question, "what is the Bible?" from an actual examination of it. The church should not keep me back by its anathemas, nor my friends blind my eyes with their loving entreaties. How did I *know* that *they* were right? I *knew* it was *possible* for them to be wrong; and I was determined, cost what it might, to know what they and myself professed to believe.

To answer the question I had proposed, I saw that my first step was to learn the history of the Bible, as a book; next, the relation of one part to another, and lastly the general sentiment of the whole. The former could be ascertained from historical records; the latter, from the book itself. I could see nothing wrong in the steps I was about to take; on the contrary, such a course seemed to be the *duty* of every honest mind, that would live on an understanding faith, rather than on a blind and passive belief. But a year previous, I would not have dared to have taken such a step. In the change my mind had undergone, I saw the advance of a rational soul, weary of its pilgrimage in darkness and doubts, and struggling to come to the light, that it might walk therein. A soul, dissatisfied with man's theory of God's government, seeking a better and a truer one, from a higher and more reliable source.



Think not that I began my investigations rashly or with a factious spirit, determined upon having my own way ; for I had no way, — I was seeking one. I came to the task with earnest prayer to God for help. I approached it, while through my mind flitted memories of those days when I implicitly relied upon those who told me that the Bible, from Genesis to Revelations, was the holy word of God. But duty, stern, unrelenting duty, urged me on. Duty to my own immortal soul ; duty to those around me ; duty to my God.

It was with such feelings I began ; and, if there was any wish in my mind that was uppermost, it was that I might find the book, as a whole, perfect, harmonious, and satisfying to my hungering, thirsting spirit.

I cannot, in the brief limits of these pages, lay before you in detail the result of my investigations, but hope to do so at some future time. I can only remark here, that I found certain writings, said to be sacred, believed to be so. I found them, not, as we should suppose the *only* guide for man in all ages of the world would be found, so engraven as to be perpetuated as long as mankind existed, — but written on perishable wood and leaves, buried in the earth at times in earthen vessels. Was it thus that your God and my God was to speak to you and me ? Did He write his words to us, all the words we should ever receive, — without which we should live in utter darkness, and lose an eternity of blessedness, — on *such* materials, thousands of years ago ? Think you God has no better means of revelation ? Think you that, if God had intended the Bible as man's only guide to immortal life, — if He had known that, without a knowledge of its contents, his earthly children, made in His own image (spiritually) and possessing a portion of His own divine nature, would be

forever miserable,—He would not by the exercise of His omnipotent power have devised some means by which to have made it universally known? Think you there would have existed *one* immortal being on earth, living ignorant of that *only* word of God; or been denied, by the intervention of any circumstance or condition, an opportunity of being saved by a belief in it?

Now, what is the fact? One thousand million human beings people the earth, each thirty years; and I make a large estimate when I say that of this vast number only one-tenth ever hear of the Bible, and that of these less than one-fourth believe it to be necessary for their happiness, so far as to embrace it as a means of salvation. Thus you see that, every thirty years, nine hundred million immortal souls are created by God, with a fore-knowledge on His part that they will be consigned to endless torment! And for what? Because they do not read a book which it is *impossible* for them to obtain; and do not believe in Christ, of whom they never could hear.

I also learned that more Gospels, Epistles, and other writings held sacred, trusted in as God's word, were destroyed by superstitious, bigoted men, that nothing might exist inculcating views differing from their own, than now exist in any form. And I asked myself, Did God write messages to *me*,—draw out charts by which I should be guided, and without which I might make shipwreck of my faith,—and allow his communications to be subject to the passionate decisions of councils founded on ecclesiastical hates, and enveloped in a thick cloud of ignorance? My reason answered, No! Truth, looking in at my half-opened door, declared, with emphatic voice, that it was not so.

I wondered what all those banished books contained.

Perhaps, much that would throw light on what remained. How did I know but that, in that ignorant age, that which was the most pure and spiritual was the first to meet the flames ; and that which gave the truest views of God, of Christ and his doctrines, and of man and his destiny, were malignantly destroyed ? Judging from what I knew of the past, it was reasonable to suppose that such was the fact. I knew that all elevated truths, all newly-discovered facts in art and science, had been illy treated. I knew that, had the power existed that was dominant in the early ages of the church, Printing, Astronomy, Geology, Phrenology, and many other valuable truths, would have been strangled at their birth.

Who knows but that a Faust or a Galileo, a Spurzheim or a Mesmer, did perish — his books burned, and death declared against any one who breathed an utterance of the newly-discovered truth ?

I next beheld what little was left of the sacred writings borne through a variety of vicissitudes : now losing a portion, now having a portion added ; now interpreted in this sense, now in that ; now pruned to suit the doctrines of a council, now revised to please a king ; until I reached the present time, and I behold it worshipped by some almost as a God, respected by others from a half-conceived idea of its sacred character, while *six hundred millions of human beings do not know there is such a book in existence*. And I look abroad and see the Persians consulting their “Zendavesta,” the Mohammedans their “Koran,” and the Brahmins their “Shaster,” as sacred books. And as I see the various contradictory views, the various oracles and books called sacred, I turn my inquiring voice within my soul, and ask whether God has not made a revelation of truth in something broader than

any book, more enduring than parchment, and adapted to all the nations of men that dwell on the face of the earth, — a revelation written in *one* language which *all* can understand, — a revelation which human hands can never alter or destroy. And I hear a strong voice within answering me “YES.”

God has not been without a witness in every nation and in every age. He has revealed Himself to all mankind. Inspiration, instead of being confined to one people and one time, has been the great gift from God to man at all periods of his history ; and not only to man, but to all living things, for all live unto Him. What teaches the flower to blossom, the bird to sing, and the beast of the field its varied employments ? What, but this ever-descending lesson of inspiration, flowing from God through all the many grades of existence, till it reaches, in its blessed ministrations, the lowest form of being ? Our Father has not been a God afar off, but has been nigh, very nigh, to every one of His children. Instead of speaking through one book alone, subject to every adulterating circumstance of life, human doctrines, credulity and superstition, He has spoken through everything in nature ; through the leaf and the river, through sunshine and through storm ; in the gentle breeze and in the wind ; and, more than all, and more direct than through all else, he has spoken through ministering spirits to man’s soul ; and in the quiet hour of seclusion, when no one was visibly present, a gentle voice from heaven whispered to man, and told him of immortality, eternal joy, and a loving God.

Spirit messengers have borne to every kindred the news of a better world, and brought the glad tidings of peace on earth, good will to man, to all the human race.



Down in the midst of those people, who never heard of the revelation you claim as the *only* one from God, angelic messengers have descended, and planted in the soil of human thought seed that shall spring up to life eternal, and bear the enduring fruit of joys immortal.

There have been prophets among all people, apostles among all nations ; and truth, that great foundation-stone of all realities, that balance-wheel of all just governments, has found its unshrinking advocates in every age and in every place.

The revelations of God have been, and are, as various as the nations He has created, and the ages in which they have existed. They have often been misinterpreted, and have partaken, in some degree, of the prevalent opinions of mankind at the time. At the time the revelations were made to the Jewish people, that nation was the most influential on earth ; and, as might be expected, the idea they had of their own importance, and supposition that they were regarded with special favor by the Almighty, led them to believe and declare that the revelation they received was the only one that God ever had, or ever would make to man. It was this spirit of exclusiveness, self-importance and ambition to rule, that led them to crush the Gentiles ; to destroy, with a savage ferocity, entire nations who were not of their own faith, prefacing all their declarations with these words, " Thus saith the Lord ; " and induced them to publish certain revelations from the spirit-world, mingled, as their great truths were, with their own half-civilized ideas of justice to man, as the only chart to guide the entire world in their own and all future times.

As man advanced from his semi-barbarous state, and the warring spirit became for a time extinct, so that peace

reigned over all the earth, other revelations were recorded as a New Testament of divine truth. In these higher, holier, and purer records, none of the spirit of revenge, hatred and scorn, was to be seen ; and the views promulgated, though containing some, were far less impregnated with human thoughts and desires. Old doctrines, gathered from the mythological beliefs of the past, remnants of barbarous systems of religion and government, and lingering shadows of a superstitious age, were seen even in this later era of spirit-communication, or revelations from God through the various degrees of spirit-life.

This new era of revelation was necessary, for man had advanced in knowledge, and his condition required an advanced state of education. The human race had passed through its elementary course of instruction ; its primary lesson had been conned over ; and now, turning from war and the indulgence of gross human passions, it aspired to a higher development of manhood.

Through Moses a revelation was given adapted to the wants of the people then existing on earth ; and it requires no great degree of discernment to perceive that what was suited to the condition of mankind then, in their primitive state, would be but illy suited to mankind in all future times. A new dispensation was, therefore, unfolded through Christ ; and the same rule applies to this as to the former case, and what was given in his day was not intended, as a whole, for all people in all coming ages of the world. Many of those teachings, however, were far in advance of his times ; and, therefore, the people, in their ignorance, reviled and crucified him. Yet it was through ignorance alone, and not through sin. With his far-reaching mind, he could perceive this, and prayed for their forgiveness. What a deep tide of love and knowl-



edge the world kept back by its bigotry and its ignorance, I know not. I can surmise somewhat of its fathomless worth, when I consider for a moment the truths he revealed, and his declaration that, after all the glorious revelations he had made, he had many things to say unto his disciples, which even they, his most intimate friends and most reliable followers, were not able to receive.

Christ preached, in some cases, doctrines directly opposed to the doctrines taught by Moses, and on this account bitter feelings were created against him in the minds of the people. The Old Testament was then the Bible. They had no other, and the religious world looked upon it as a sacred book, which it was blasphemy to doubt. When Christ came and said, your Bible says thus and thus, but I say unto you do directly the reverse, the people became excited. They said he was from the devil, and took up stones wherewith to stone him; drove him from their midst, and he became, as thousands of his followers in the path of reform have been and are even in this our day, in the eyes of many, nothing but an infidel, turning the world upside down; a heretic, a blasphemer, and a despiser of all things good.

It is admitted that there were inspired men in olden times; but you deny that there are any now, or that there have been any at any period since. What is the authority for such a denial? Has God ever told man that the volume of His revelation has been closed, and that never again shall his voice be heard? Ye worshippers of what you deem the only book of life, can you point out to me the passage which tells us of such a finale to the teachings of God?

When Christ came, the Jews had their "only book of life," and they said, Revelation is closed. God speaks

no more to man. Was it true? It was not. Christ spake as never man before him spake; and truths came purer, and holier, and brighter, than the heart of man had ever conceived. In this, our day, the church shuts down the windows of heaven, and says to the people, "Revelation is closed. God speaks no more to man." It says to them, "Take what your fathers had, and seek for no new revelation. What was adapted to their wants is suited to yours." It tells man that what was suitable for the human race in its infancy is suitable for it in its manhood — not for a moment consulting reason, which proclaims the ever-enduring truth, that, as conditions change, so must that change which will serve to satisfy human wants. Were the church infallible, we might be tempted to listen to its commands. But what is this church — what this darling institution, which you believe to be the object of God's special care? It is composed of discordant elements — of men who have so little regard for the golden rule that they hesitate not to speak embittering words against each other on the slightest provocation; raising up points for idle dispute, upon the most trivial questions; and, according to its creed, leaving souls to perish, while disputing with itself upon forms and ceremonies, and battling for popular teachers and high-cost temples. *This* is the "church" that would manacle thought and stay the car of Progress. This, the creature of man's creation, that would be my guide, open and shut the gates of God's eternal temple, and ask me to bow to its authority before I might enter therein. This four-walled tabernacle is set up as the ark of safety, in which, amid its jarring strifes, its loud contentions, and its whirlwind of discordant doctrines, I am told my soul shall find rest!

Believe me, this is not of God — not that which He

hath blessed. His church is as broad as His limitless universe. It hath foundations lying deeper than human plummet ever reached ; a dome higher than man's most aspiring thought, and its creed is as true and changeless as the great I Am. Such is the church of God — such the offspring of the creative Mind of all creations. O, brethren, behold the church of God, which His own right hand hath planted ; then, cast one single glance upon your own superstitions, your errors and your wanderings in the shades you have loved so well and so long ; repent and turn to Him, and He will in no wise cast thee out.

God reveals himself to you every day. His revelations are adapted to your wants. He asks you not to feed your hungered souls on that which was provided for another people, in another age ; but, fresh as the air you breathe, comes from the courts of heaven his divine truth to the waiting spirit of man.

Take the boon so freely offered. Read the lessons of God in every manifestation of Himself in His works around you. Above and around are myriad spirits waiting for you to open your mind to the truths they have learned amid the shining ranks of the blessed. Be passive — listen to their gentle teachings, and within your inmost soul you shall know that God's revelations are not exhausted, but that to the willing in heart, to the earnest seeker after truth, he speaks unceasingly, and breathes on them the benisons of a Father's love.

But, ah ! it is *creed* that keeps you where you are. It is creed that will not allow you to advance. Creed is the great lion in man's pathway, roaring, with a loud voice, thus far shalt thou go and no farther, and here shall thy knowledge be stayed. And man has obeyed the voice of this creed, though strongly against his innate ideas of

duty and privilege. For my own part, I consider the popular church idea of a creed as detrimental to all of man's best interests here and hereafter. The idea of confining within the limits of human words a view of God and his works, is an erroneous one. This chaining up the aspirations of the soul to some mile-stone on the road of endless progression, makes the soul dwarfish, and all its faculties cramped and earthly. Such a course is neither just to God, who is ever calling us up, nor to man, whose divinity within stretches forth its arms to the divinity without, and seeks to know more of God, His works and His government.

And again; should a creed adapt itself to the truth, or should truth adapt itself to the creed? Should newly-discovered truths be rejected because they do not conform to the articles of belief which we have signed, or should we change our creed to meet their requirements? It is a simple question, and one which a child might answer. But the church will not. Wise doctors, eloquent teachers, and learned schoolmen, will not. And why? Because they long since adopted certain views; they long ago formed fixed opinions, all sworn to, signed, sealed and delivered to the keepers of their consciences, and the salaried guardians of their minds; and they cherish them most sacredly, bow down and worship them, and work themselves into a firm conviction that all things in heaven and earth must do the same.

Change the creed! It is impossible. Heaven and earth may pass, but this parchment of limitation to man's aspirations shall remain forever untouched.

Look to the past. See every new development of truth battling with creeds. Jesus and his disciples before the infuriated populace, waging a determined warfare



against the creeds of the old Jewish church. Astronomy, gazing up into the broad expanse, saw new and sublime truths. It declared them, and what was the result? Lo! an army of zealous churchmen looked at their darling creeds, and, finding that the newly-discovered truths conflicted with their ideas of infallible wisdom, turned upon the defenceless discoverer and denounced him, pouring upon him the severest anathemas in this world, and calling down upon him curses in the world to come. Did I say defenceless? He was *not* defenceless. He was clothed with the armor of truth. He battled with the foe in the strength of right; and, though the world sharpened its instruments of torture, and the prison-house of his soul was laid low, yet he lived and triumphed through other minds, upon whom, as a ministering spirit, he acted with mighty power.

Galileo's soul walked out in the broad fields of truth, and his eye caught a glimpse of something new for the treasure-house of his mind. He garnered it in. The world saw him; the watchful eyes of the protectors of the creed saw him, and forthwith he was dragged out and thrust into halls of inquisitorial torture. He was told that his priceless gem was worthless in comparison with their creed; and he was commanded to deny its worth, throw it to the winds, and embrace with loving heart the endangered creed. And Galileo quailed before that host of embittered enemies, and his better nature trembled and grew abashed for the time. His lips forswore the truth, but his soul did not; and, as before that tyrannizing council he denied his faith, he bit his lips in an agony of mind, and tried to keep his struggling soul within, but he could not. His lips parted, and his soul

sent out its earnest declaration in those memorable words, "It does move, nevertheless."

After many such struggles of truth with creed, what became of creed? Why, the creed that would not stir an inch moved a mile; and I find *that* creed, to-day, after rising in direct opposition to *all* known truths at their first development, adapted to those truths, and even resting on them as pillars of support. New discoveries of truth are constantly being made, and as often the battle opens anew. Creed, changed somewhat in form, is yet the same conservative block under the wheels of the car of progression. It is the same obstacle in the way of human advancement.\*

Verily, the children of the world, so called, are wiser than the children of light. Ask the merchant to subscribe to certain articles by which he shall always be governed, and the knowledge contained in which he shall

\* "There is nothing imaginary in the statement that Creed-Power is now beginning to prohibit the Bible as really as Rome did, though in a subtler way. During the whole course of seven years' study, the Protestant candidate for the ministry sees before him an unauthorized statement, spiked down and stereotyped, of what he must find in the Bible, or be martyred. And does any one, acquainted with human nature, need be told that he studies under a tremendous pressure of motive? Is that freedom of opinion? — 'the liberty wherewith Christ maketh free'? Rome would have given that. Every one of her clergy might have studied the Bible to find there the Pontifical creed on pain of death. Was that liberty?"

"Hence I say that liberty of opinion, in our theological seminaries, is a mere form. To say nothing of the thumb-screw of criticism, by which every original mind is tortured into negative propriety, the whole boasted liberty of the student consists in a choice of chains — a choice of handcuffs — whether he will wear the Presbyterian handcuff, or the Methodist, Baptist, Episcopal or other evangelical handcuff. Hence it has secretly come to pass that the ministry themselves dare not study their Bibles. Large portions thereof are seldom touched. It lies useless lumber; or, if they do study and search, they dare not show the people what they find there. There is something criminal in saying anything new. It is shocking to utter words that have not the mould of age upon them." — *Rev. Chas. Beecher's Discourse at the dedication of the Second Presbyterian Church at Fort Wayne, Ind., 1846.*



never transcend. Ask the mechanic to limit his inventive genius, and to plod on as he does now, without making a single effort to improve. Ask the professional man to limit his knowledge within those bounds which he cannot *now* pass. From each of the interrogated the response will be, "I will do no such thing. As I live I will learn; for to-morrow may bring to my view a truth that I do not discern to-day, and I will be free that I may accept it."

Such would be the reply to a proposition to manacle the progressive spirit of mercantile, mechanical, and progressive enterprise; and think you the Christian, with a far broader ocean of truth before him, should be content in gathering the pebbles on the shore, and, when an opportunity is presented for him to make an advance over that ocean, turn his back upon its sparkling tide, and say, "I cannot. I have made a solemn oath to remain where I am, and I will not take one single step forward."

Such is the answer of the popular church. The church is inactive.\* It is the *last* in every great reform. As it

\* "To the shame of the church, it must be confessed that the foremost men in all our philanthropic movements, in the interpretation of the spirit of the age; in the practical application of genuine Christianity; in the reformation of abuses in high and in low places; in the vindication of the rights of man; and in practically redressing his wrongs, in the moral and intellectual regeneration of the race, are the so-called *infidels* (?) in our land. The church has pusillanimously left not only the working-oar, but the very reins of salutary reform, in the hands of men she denounces as inimical to Christianity, and who are practically doing with all their might, for humanity's sake, that which the church ought to be doing for Christ's sake; and if they succeed, as succeed they will, in abolishing slavery, banishing rum, restraining licentiousness, reforming abuses and elevating the masses, then the recoil upon Christianity will be disastrous in the extreme. Woe, woe, woe to Christianity, when infidels, (?) by force of nature, or the tendency of the age, get ahead of the church in morals; and in the practical work of Christianity, in some instances, they are already far, far in advance; in the vindication of truth, righteousness and liberty, they are the pioneers, beckoning to a sluggish church to follow."—*New York Evangelist*.

beholds the temple of Truth it will not enter therein itself, and those who would enter it hinders.

It is on account of an honest investigation — a desire not to build up any creed, or to destroy any, but with a conscientious regard for truth — that I am led to the inevitable conclusion that the Bible contains much that is good, and pure, and from God ; and, at the same time, much that is the reverse. In thus rejecting certain portions of the book as unworthy of God, I do no more than many of the fathers of the church have done. I follow the example of those whom the Christian world considers the pillars of its temple. And, if they had lived in *this* age, they would have rejected as divine the same portions as all thinking men now do. With the light that now dawns upon the world, they would not have consented to calling inconsistencies God's truth, or anger, revenge, murder or cruelty, expressive of His character. But their ideas in that age were crude and unrefined. They thought God such a one as themselves. If they, in that dark era of the world's history, had the right to say what should be accepted as God's word, — if they could compile, from what was considered "sacred," a Bible to suit *their* ideas of God and humanity, — have not *we* an equal right ? Are not men *now* further advanced in morality, art and science, and, therefore, better able to judge of divine truth, than they ? And shall we not do so ? Honesty would commend such an undertaking ; but blind credulity, bigoted fanaticism and ignorance, would exclaim with feelings of horror at the idea of such a step.

*I* do not reject those portions of the Bible which the reason\* and common sense of any unprejudiced mind

\* "The demand of intellect and reason must be met, in order to satisfy a reasonable being." — *Professor Stuart*.

would recognize as truth, and consequently God's word, wherever found. I love the humane, heavenly and sublime teachings of Jesus, who died on Calvary, rather than retreat from the position he had assumed, and so gloriously maintained. He fought against the *same* teachings which I would bring forward to convince you that all within the Bible is not the word of God.

Read his Sermon on the Mount, and compare it with the Old Testament, and even with some parts of the New, and you will see how often he declares his disbelief in the sentiments therein inculcated, and teaches the opposite ; \* and the probability is, that had not those bigoted men who trimmed up the reputed sacred writings to suit their own views existed ; or, had they been generous enough to allow the whole history of the life and acts of Christ to come to us, and not have committed it to the flames, we should have had much more from him in opposition to the teachings of some parts of the Old Testament.

But, in the age of the world in which those councils met, the teachings of the old Jewish writers were more acceptable than the pure, heaven-born words of Jesus.

Truly was it that "he spake as never man spake," and told his disciples many things which their dull, earthly natures could not understand ; and had many more things to say unto them, but they could not bear them then.

In that most disastrous conflagration kindled by the superstitious Constantine and his exasperated bishops,

\* Matthew 5 : 21, 27, 31, 33.

much that would have shed light on our pathway was consumed. As its curling flames ascended, the grand crowning act of the crucifixion of Christ was consummated. The priests and the rulers of the people had a few centuries previous murdered him, but yet his words dwelt on earth, marking a long line of glorious light amid the darkness that surrounded his path. The few humble Christians, whose names had never been emblazoned on parchment-scrolls, had doubtless treasured up as sacred books, — as sacred as Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, — a full and faithful account of the Saviour's words and works, — too faithful, indeed, to harmonize with their Jewish scriptures of Moses and the prophets ; too faithful to suit the superstitious emperor, the tyrannical king, the ambitious officials in church and state, — and what should be done ? Why, destroy them ! Burn up all that speaks unfavorably of those older scriptures ; convince the people that Moses and the prophets speak nothing but God's words. Teach lisping infancy, trusting childhood, and sanguine youth, that war is right, slavery is right, murder is right. Let the character of God, as idolized by barbarous nations in an undeveloped state of humanity, be acknowledged as *true*. But there was a loud voice calling for the more humane teachings of later times ; and there was a voice within that would not be wholly silenced. To answer it, the council admitted as genuine a few gospels and epistles. The rest were consigned to the flames. Well might angels weep when Christ died beneath the hands of persecutors, and all the efforts to introduce to mankind the true character of God seemed failing. But, even after that, there was hope that his holy and humane teachings, recorded in books by those who loved him so deeply as to



worship him, might prove seed that would spring up to life eternal, and bear the fruit of joy immortal. But now that those books were consigned to destruction, now that death was the fate of him who dared to speak of them, where should angelic hope rest ?

Angel eyes, piercing the future, could see centuries of dark and gloomy clouds, — could see mankind tortured with doubts ; mankind, with unjust views of God and his works, — and they wept. O, tell me not that angels cannot weep ! An intelligent being that would not weep at *such* a result, at *such* a prospect, must be less than human, — far, very far below an angel.

And what they prophetically beheld has taken place ; and mankind is now emerging from the deep and chilling shadows of that cloud which covered all the earth.

You believe the *whole* Bible to be the word of God ; I do not ! Wherein do we differ ? I am willing to rest the question upon the great heart of humanity, and abide the answer.

You believe that God repents of His acts.<sup>1</sup> You believe He deceives the people.<sup>2</sup> You believe that He destroyed seventy thousand innocent men for the sin of one man.<sup>3</sup> You believe that He had a special people,<sup>4</sup> whom He assisted to drive from the face of the earth all other nations.<sup>5</sup> You believe He instituted slavery,<sup>6</sup> and the selling of human beings.<sup>7</sup> You believe He countenanced licentious practices.<sup>8</sup> You believe that He sent

<sup>1</sup> Gen. 6 : 6 ; 2 Sam. 24 : 16.

<sup>5</sup> Deut. 7.

<sup>2</sup> 2 Thess. 2 : 11, 12 ; Ezekiel 14 : 9.

<sup>6</sup> Leviticus 25 : 1, 46.

<sup>3</sup> 2 Samuel 24.\*

<sup>7</sup> Leviticus 25 : 1, 44.

<sup>4</sup> Deut. 7 : 6.

<sup>8</sup> 2 Sam. 12 : 11.

\* "The principles of honor and right demand of God not so to charge the wrong conduct of one being to others as to punish one person for the conduct of another. \* \* No personal honor, no exaltation, no amount of enjoyment, would bribe a truly honorable mind to be satisfied with a

floods,<sup>9</sup> and famine,<sup>10</sup> and pestilence,<sup>11</sup> for the special purpose of injuring mankind. And you believe that He is subject to jealousy,<sup>12</sup> anger,<sup>13</sup> revenge,<sup>14</sup> and at times merciless,<sup>15</sup> inciting His creatures<sup>16</sup> to destroy each other.

In none of these things do *I* believe. And I deeply, heartily feel thankful to God for the light that has opened my eyes to the truth. I thank Him for the reason within me that revolts against such ideas of the Holy One, who ruleth the boundless universe, and displays His love and goodness alike in the blade of grass and in countless worlds that revolve in infinite space. I thank God that I can see Him as He reveals Himself, not in one book, subject to council decrees and flames of man's kindling, but in that broader book, which no hand can alter, whose records are always true, always instructive and indestructible — the Book of Nature. Study that, and you will find no contradictions. Study that to learn wisdom which passeth human understanding. Study that to learn the one great law that governs atoms and worlds, — yourself included in the broad inventory. In that you will find God's true character. Read it; read it as it is written on the sunbeam falling impartially on all! On the budding flower; on the sparkling stream; on earth; on sky!

O, man, — man with a Mind! with a Reason! Man made in the image of God, and destined to advance towards *His* perfection, — use that Mind, exercise that

<sup>9</sup> Gen. 6 : 17.

<sup>10</sup> Psa. 105 : 16.

<sup>11</sup> 2 Sam. 24 : 15.

<sup>12</sup> Deut. 29 : 20.

<sup>13</sup> Deut. 32 : 22, 25.

<sup>14</sup> Deut. 32 : 39, 41.

<sup>15</sup> Isa. 27 : 11.

<sup>16</sup> 1 Sam. 15 : 2, 3.

Reason, honor that image, that you may not be retarded in your progress !

Look, I beseech of you, brethren, honestly at this subject ! Look at it in its *true* light, not in the false glare which sectarianism throws around it. Throw aside the bandages from your eyes, and loosen the fetters that shackle your reason ! Be men ! O, forget not your nature ! Sell not for old opinions, or old dogmas, of far less worth than Esau's mess of pottage, *your* glorious birthright ! Deep, deep within your soul is that light that lighteth every man that cometh into the world. It is the spirit of God, the intuitive truth, thine own reason, given thee by thy Creator. Let no idle wind disturb it, but let it glow. It is gently fanned by angel-breath ; and tenderly is it watched and cherished by angel-hands.

Believe me, it is not that I am opposed to truth that I am led to speak as I have of the Bible, but because I have loved truth. Yea, I want, you want, we all want *truth* ; and he who would find it *must not expect to find it as he may have been taught, but as it is*.

I cannot allow the present occasion to pass without alluding to and urging upon your candid consideration the great truth of the eternal progression of all created things. It is written indelibly upon every atom of the universe. Nature proclaims it in each of her countless forms of operation ; and revelation, as it is manifested in the word of God, repeats the truth. Eternal progression ! who can conceive of its limitless course, or count the distance already passed ? Think of unending advancement ! To what untold heights of knowledge and blessedness the soul will have attained ere the path is but begun !

This law is so plainly written on everything we can see, hear or feel, that it is indeed a wonder that any mind can, for a single moment, doubt it. Strange that any should conclude that God, in any of his works or ways, goes backward, or that the mighty wheels of the stupendous creation retrograde! The mind that finds rest on such a conclusion can have no just conception of the Creator, but makes that infinite being a finite creature like itself, subject to those little inconsistencies of action to-day which must be rectified to-morrow. To say that God's works do not advance, is to doubt his wisdom to plan, and his power to execute; for such a condition implies that the governing principle is inefficient to carry out its design in the creation.

For my own part, I cannot conceive of any such idea as retrogression in God's works. The very thought is repulsive. Reason rebels against such a view of its Father's government, and wars against it in every unprejudiced mind. Time moves on, and with it bears the universe with its myriad worlds, its countless grades of being; and, in spite of his opinion, man himself—every man. There is no elect; no favored few; no chosen people, but *all*, every one, is marching onward to more glorious temples of truth, and to more ennobling views of God.

The very fact that time moves forward—that to-day is in advance of yesterday—that trees grow, that the river flows on, that everything we can see or hear progresses, should lead every thoughtful mind to the inquiry, "Is it possible that anything can go back?" To deny the law of progression is to deny our own reason, and the marked operations of all things about us. Every intuition of our soul says, "Go on." Every motive that



influences us urges us to advance ; and, though some will not as readily as others obey the divine command, yet it is imperative, and all will eventually perceive that they are subject to it as an inevitable law of their being.

Those conditions which, to our limited vision, appear to denote a backward tendency, are but incidental, and have no permanency. Certain events may produce those conditions, and they may retard the soul in its course ; but those obstacles will inevitably be overcome, and the man go onward.

All created things speak to us this great lesson, — Progression. The seed planted in the ground progresses through various phases of condition until it becomes fruit ; and, stopping not there, is eaten and becomes a part of the animal body. Could we trace it through its further advancements, we should see how the law of progression leads it along unceasingly forever. The drop of water quivers in the sunbeam, mingles with the cloud, falls to the earth, bathes the opening rose, trickles through the ground, nestles in some hidden cell far below the surface, and, at some future time, emerges into light in a new form of beauty. But it stops not there. God has marked on its tiny surface the living word progression, and it unhesitatingly obeys his decree. And thus it is with all the works of God. The great procession moves on — marching onward and upward to higher states of existence.

How long, think you, matter and mind marched hand in hand before it reached that position described by Moses as its first condition ? Our minds cannot comprehend the length of that journey, or the ages multiplied by ages that numbered the years of their pilgrimage. To suppose that man was created in one day or six days, six years or six thousand years, is to suppose God to have acted contrary

to those laws which He has established for the government of His works, and in accordance with the requirements of which all things else were created. He makes the blade of grass by these laws, and the drops of water are the work of a long period of time ; but man, the highest perfection of his earthly works, — man, the receptacle of divinity, he who is the nearest approach on earth to God in heaven, — you are told, was created at once, without being subject to that law which governs atoms and planets. Such a thought is preposterous to a reasoning mind. It leads it to realize the truth that God's great book of Nature is more reliable than any book, of whatever name, which man looks upon as sacred. No matter who wrote the book you hold in your hand ; no matter what supposed claims it has upon your belief, or who declares it to be a volume of sacred truth ; if Nature has *one* truth that is at variance with its declarations, teaches *one* lesson which that book opposes, believe Nature, and you cannot err. If a book should tell you that the rainbow never existed until a certain time, and that then it was created for a special purpose, and Nature teaches you that from the moment that sunlight and water existed that arch of beauty has also existed, when those elements have been in corresponding relations to each other, believe Nature. Should a book tell you that man was made in a day — in an instant, — that all the wonderful mechanism of his body was formed at once, independent of all known laws, and contrary to every teaching of Nature, — believe it not. Place your confidence in God, as He reveals Himself in His works, rather than in any book which man tells you is His truth.

Trust your own reason, which God has given you whereby to judge of all matters, rather than the theories

of man, and those declarations which he conceives to be eternal truths, but which may be, nevertheless, time-worn errors.

The orthodoxy of one age has been the infidelity of that which preceded it. And in this is seen the working of that law which governs all, and leads all into the ranks of the army whose head is God, marching on and through the eternal country; for, progressing from the errors and misconceptions of the past, the human mind makes an advance towards truth; and though, in that advanced state, it has not reached its goal, yet it is in closer proximity to it.

That man has progressed I have briefly endeavored to prove from the records of the Bible, and have shown that, as his condition improved, new revelations have been made from the spirit-world, leading him on as rapidly as he was prepared to advance. As it would be useless to attempt to teach a child astute science who could scarcely comprehend the use of the alphabet, so it would be worse than in vain to reveal to mankind the nature, requirements, and joys of the spirit-world in those past ages, when he had made but a slight advance towards the attainment of a knowledge of his earthly condition, and the nature, requirements and joys, of this. This accounts for the little information we have of the future state in the Bible.

The human race may be compared to human life. It has had its infancy, its childhood, its youth, and it is now on the eve of its manhood. Its destiny is to progress, and it will. Looking at the mental condition of mankind now,—comparing it with that of all previous times, in its scientific and moral relations,—no reasonable mind will deny that it is far in advance of all previous conditions.

Behold how knowledge is increased. Books are plentiful, and easily obtained. A few pennies will purchase more than the library of many a scholar of olden times contained, and the child that cannot tell their use has books which philosophers and orators and poets of ancient times would have given fortunes to possess, — holding them in trust for the use of their minds, when, older grown, they can understandingly receive the knowledge they will freely impart. Lectures on all subjects are heard in every town and village, and the noblest minds of earth address vast audiences of the people on matters which are of the utmost importance to them, but which, in all past times, have been held exclusively by the few. Witness the rapid spread of new and living ideas, the healthy, vigorous action of the mental faculties, induced by the universal circulation of knowledge. Men debate now in little gatherings around the fireside, and in the work-shops, upon subjects once confined to halls of scientific societies and theological councils; and the little fellow, scarce out of the nursery, might teach, in sound doctrine, the plodding student of the past, whose years had numbered threescore and ten. Yea, teach a Moses of sun, moon and stars, a Solomon wisdom, and even a Paul the true principles of government.

Wealth no longer holds in its relentless grasp the knowledge for which the human mind thirsts. Humanity is nearing its Father's house, and is giving up the dry husks of olden years for the better and more satisfying food of the present.

Thank God that it is so! Thank Him that He has seen us afar off, and is running to meet us! From amid the musty tomes of inherited ideas, and the crumbling pillars of ignorance and superstition, man is arising. He



is coming forth like Lazarus, from the dark tomb of error, to sit clothed and in his right mind, catching words of truth as they fall from the lips of God, and are recorded by the great penman, Nature, in that volume open to all, whose leaves are for the healing of the nations.

Man has progressed. Man begins to feel his individuality, and to know that he has reason to guide him, and that it is no part of his duty to be led by blind faith ; feels that the mere say-so of any man, however great his pretensions may be, is not a sufficient foundation for him to rest upon, but that he must study and exercise his reason, that God-given, heaven-born attribute, so nearly allied to the divine mind in all matters of faith and practice.

The world is awaking. Step by step has been its course, until now mind governs matter, and the animal is subordinate to the spirit.

This governing progression, from which there is no escape, either wilfully or by neglect, extends through all the limitless future. When man leaves this rudimental state of existence, he does not leave the jurisdiction of this law. Leaving this world, he enters the world of spirits unchanged in his moral and intellectual condition. If the man has, while in this world, used every means within his reach to press onward and grasp the great truths of God, he will continue to follow that inclination from the first moment he enters the spirit-world. If, on the other hand, he has cared for none of these things, if he has not become interested enough in the universe, within and without him, to put forth his hand and partake of the bounties spread profusely around him, on his entrance there he will be as he was here, inactive, and unimpressible by the beauties and joys of the spirit-world.

The former will press onward and upward with the speed of a free spirit towards the perfections and the glories beyond ; the latter will remain apparently unmoved.

As in this world some men advance to honorable positions, overcoming every conceivable obstacle, while others remain in an inferior state, without manifesting the slightest desire to progress, so, in that other state to which we are all hastening, each will be governed by his own innate propensity. But think not that he whose condition is so abject will never advance. That law, eternal as God and universal as His works, has an influence upon *him*. That law which bids the stone in our streets grow, and it obeys, though slowly, and, to human eyes, almost, if not quite, imperceptibly, will cause *every* soul to progress. The decree hath gone forth, God will draw all things unto Himself, and who shall stay His mighty purpose ?

There are spirits whose progress is so slow that it cannot be seen but by the omniscient eye ; yet they do actually progress. There is an eternity before them all. Count, if you can, the ages that stretch onward in the future, and say is there not opportunity for the operations of that glorious law and governing principle to which all created things are and will be forever subject.

Of God, and through Him, and to Him, are all things.\* He has so declared ; and every blade of grass putting forth its tiny fibres and stretching upward, every river pressing onward, every human mind aspiring to grasp some higher round in the ladder whose top no eye has seen, admit the truth. None but man denies it. Man,

\* Romans 11 : 36.

the fullest development of God's works on earth, says it is not so. Throwing aside his reason, he accepts as truth the errors of an unprogressed age. He closes his ear to the voice of God, speaking in all things to his soul ; he shuts his eye to Nature's plain disclosures, and says it is not so. In vain does truth present itself in a thousand attractive forms. In vain does an enlightened mind, freed from the fetters of a tyrannical authority, endeavor to direct the mass of mankind into the paths which Nature opens to the throne of God. In vain do holy spirits — angels of heaven — wing their way to earth, prove their identity, convince of their sincerity, and unite in repeating God's everlasting truth, that the soul progresses as ages revolve. Mankind spurn all. Bound with adamant chains to an altar dedicated to an unknown God, they kiss the riven links — and call it sacrilegious to break their bands !

O, Man ! despising reason,—Man, limited by the length of a chain, and fearing to look beyond a prescribed range of thought ! will you not break your bands ? Will you rather wait until they rust from your hands, and you are driven like slaves to your Father's house, forced to inhabit one of those temples, not made with hands, and to take that place which truth has prepared for you ?

How happy the thought that we are ever led onward ! that God takes no backward steps, neither suffers His works to remain idle !

With what ennobling ideas is the soul filled, as it thinks for a moment of its future career, of an eternity of progression ! O, how weak the human mind when it attempts to conceive of such a course ! To what measureless heights will the soul have ascended, when ages, which no figures can compute, shall have rolled away, and yet

the race will be but begun, the first step scarcely taken ! We shall ever be upon the threshold of God's temple ; for ever and ever, through ages unceasing, approach, but never reach, its inner court.

Progression ! can you realize the meaning of that word ? Eternity is its course ; can you conceive of its duration ?

I have written longer than I purposed, yet but a fraction of what I would say to you has been presented ; and feebly have I portrayed the deep feelings of my soul on the points alluded to. I am not alone in a change of belief ; and, even if I were, it would be no matter of concern to me, for I have the full consciousness of being in the right path. Yet I am not alone ; there are tens of thousands in the leading churches of our land who entertain similar views with my own, and the time is near at hand when there will be an overturn in the religious systems of the age that will be equalled only by the approaching political revolutions of Europe.

And now I must close. In your letter to me you say :

“ We summon you to appear before the church on Friday evening, then and there to show reasons, if any you have, why the church should not proceed to separate you from its fold.”

Brethren, I have no such “ reasons.” I seek none. Should a man give a reason why he should be held to an erroneous belief ? Does the slave love his chains so well that he would show his master how he might rivet them stronger ? Is darkness preferable to light ? Cold to warmth ? Falsehood to truth ? Reasons ! Reasons for what ? Reasons why you should not confirm my acts and opinions. I long ago excommunicated your doc-



trines from my fold, and shall I give *reasons* why you should not ratify that free act of my own? I think not.

I have nothing to retract; not one word to alter; and, though your excommunication was a step to the scaffold, I would not deny the faith that is in me. I *know* in what I believe. There is no doubting, no hesitation, no fear in the course laid out before me.

Excommunication for opinion's sake, for conscience' sake, is an *honor*, not a shame. Jesus wore the badge. With it upon him he went to heaven, and found it no obstacle in his way to a seat at his Father's right hand. Paul wore it. All the good men of old wore it. Torture could not wrest it from them. Flames could not burn it off. Luther, Melancthon, gloried in it. Bunyan wore it in prison. Thousands have been excommunicated from the popular church for conscience' sake, and tens of thousands are yet to be. Man wishes to advance, and if the church will not advance, he must come out from that church, and be separate. If he cannot carry the "sluggish church" with him, he *must* go without it.

Again, you say, "We entreat you to consider your course, and retrace your steps."

Brethren, such advice comes late. I considered it long ago. I have considered every step I have taken; and it is this act of consideration that has led me to renounce my former belief. You speak as though the inevitable result of a consideration of my course would be to return to your belief; but it is just the reverse. Had I not "considered," I might have remained within your "fold" till now. But I thank my Father in heaven that

I was led to consider my course, and, by His divine aid, have been led to change it.

Retrace my steps ! No, *never*, until you can show me a brighter path, one upon which the light of heaven shines more benignantly ; not until you can lead my feet into steps more productive of true soul-happiness, whose course is more full of angelic joy — joy that the heart can feel.

Retrace my steps ! You know not what you ask. Would you shut from my soul a faith, a daily experience, far surpassing, in heartfelt satisfaction, all that the most intense human language can express ?

You say, “ Meanwhile, we shall not cease to pray for your restoration and return to duty.” Restoration to what ? To error. Return to duty ? I have not forsaken it. Brethren, pray not that I may return to your views, but rather pray for yourselves. Pray that you may be led to see God’s holy truth. Pray for that independence of mind that will enable you to look at His manifestations of that truth, and to accept their teachings, even though they clash with your own preconceived views. Pray to God that He will lead you to the fountain of all truth, where you may drink and be refreshed with its pure waters. Then you will grow into His likeness ; then you will live more as man should live, with a greater joy dwelling within you ; and, when the time of your change shall come, you will meet it with a glad smile, and enter at once into the great temple of God, the house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens, with a faith that shall know no wavering.

You and I might fall, and the waving grass conceal from mortal eyes the place of our burial ; the world, and all it contains, might pass away. The heavens, that

great storehouse of mighty constellations, which no man or angel can number, might be rolled together as a scroll and perish ; but truth would still exist. It would survive all these, and live, because God lived. We need not tremble for the truth. The efforts of man to build up this theory, or sustain that creed, will prove of no avail, unless they be founded on this rock of ages. The word of God is not confined to any book or books. *Truth* is the word of God, and wherever in the broad universe you find truth, there you find God's word. Paradise is before the human race, not behind it. The perfect man is the last, not the first. Instead of looking mournfully at the past, and lamenting over what has been called the fall of Adam, we should look forward to the future, and rejoice with great joy over the coming man.

Methinks I am disenthralled from the conditions that bind me to earth ; and, a freed spirit, I stand above this world, trembling as I look below upon the chaotic mass of mind, that heaves and breaks on the shores of Humanity. I tremble for the fate which I seem to see await it. But a good angel bids me look above. I turn my eyes heavenward, and I see a host which no man can number, bending all its energies for the relief and development of man. I see God as displayed in all His works, putting forth His powerful arm, and reaching down from the high glories of His most exalted existence, to lift man from the cold depths of the ocean of materialism, up to Himself, to bask in the warm sunlight of His love ; and my soul takes courage.

O, who would not rest his faith on *such* a foundation ? I *feel* that God reigns, and I *know* that, angry and turbulent as the sea of human destiny may now seem to be,

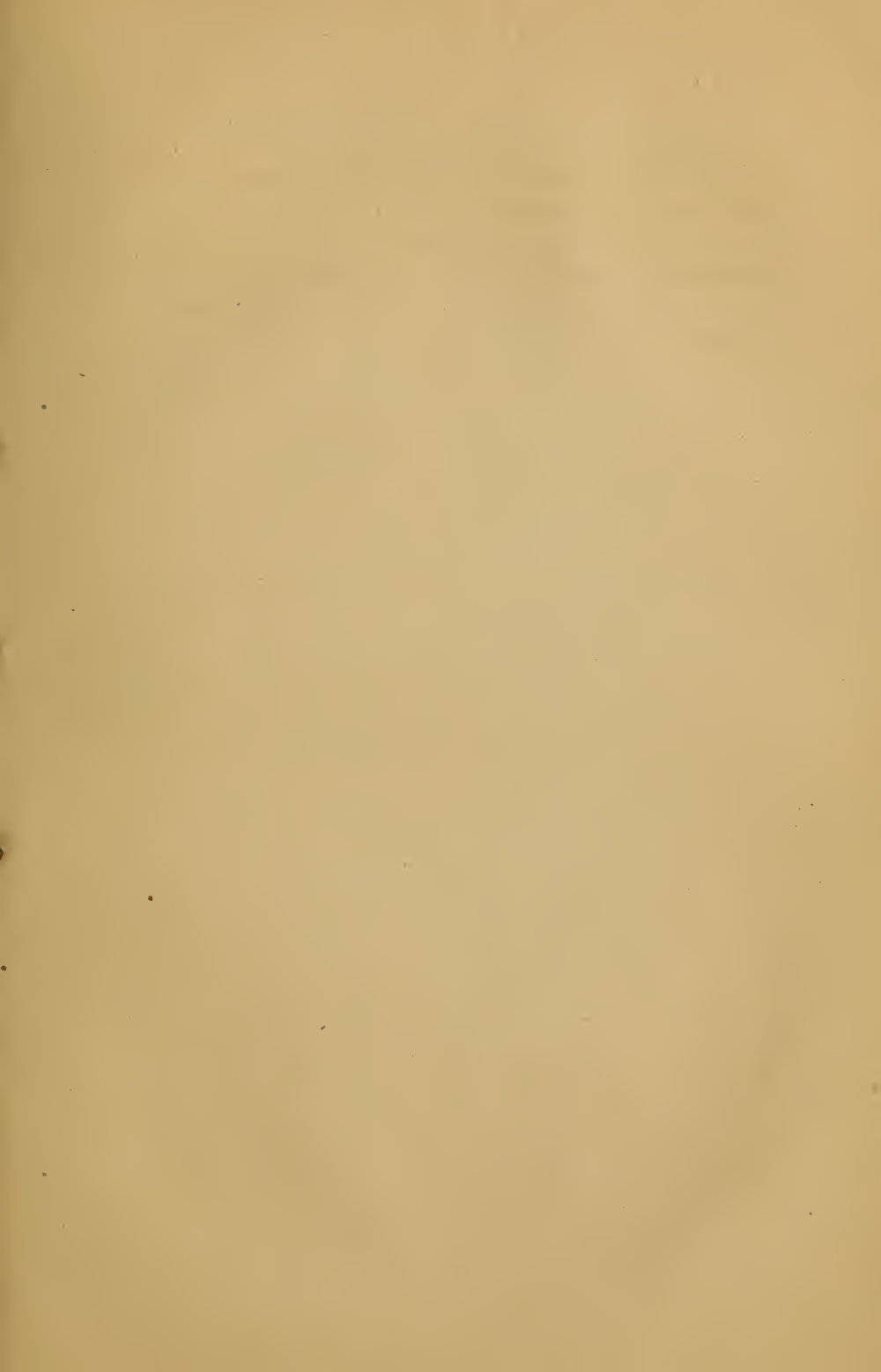
He hath said to its wild waters, "Peace, be still," and it is obeying His command.

In the faith of one God, one Religion, one Destiny, for all mankind, I am, and shall be ever, your brother,

JOHN S. ADAMS.

CHELSEA, May 25, 1854.







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